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ABSTRACT

This practicum study was designed to improve the communication and social skills of 43 students (ages 14-22) with developmental disabilities by involving families in at-home treatment activities that reinforced and enhanced in-school and community-based speech/language therapy and by increasing attendance of parents at school meetings and functions. Intervention included development of individualized speech notebooks containing activities, lessons, and creative ideas designed to enhance communication skills across the curriculum, in the home, and in the community. Telephone conferences were held with each family and a talent fair was held to showcase students' communication skills. Results indicated greater attendance by parents at school functions, increased involvement by parents in individualized education program conferences, and increased collaboration of parents and teachers to develop school programs. Appendices include, among others, a family information and involvement survey, sample newsletters, and the talent show program. (Contains 37 references.) (DB)

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ED 381 956

Improving the Communication Skills of Developmentally Disabled Students (Ages 14–22) Through Parental/Family Involvement

by

Harriet A. Pitcher

Cluster 58

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Child and Youth Studies in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
1995

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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January 27, 1995
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This practicum report was submitted by Harriet A. Pitcher under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

Feb. 13, 1995
Date of Final Approval of Report

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ABSTRACT

Improving the communication skills of developmentally disabled students (ages 14–22) through parental/family involvement. Pitcher, Harriet A., 1994: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Communications Skills/Developmentally Disabled /High School Students/Parent–Family Involvement/Whole Language/Assistive Technology/Community–Based Instruction/ Volunteers.

This practicum was designed to improve the communication and social skills of developmentally disabled students ages 14–22 by involving families in at–home treatment activities that reinforced and enhanced in–school and community–based speech–language therapy and to increase attendance of parents at school meetings and functions. The program concept was introduced to the school's principal, teachers and teacher aides at a faculty meeting and then to families in a telephone conference and at the school's open house.

The writer developed a speech notebook that contained activities, lessons, and creative ideas designed to enhance communication skills across the curriculum, in the home, and in the community. A talent fair that promoted communication skills verbally, visually, gesturally, and through the use of assistive technology allowed the students not only to practice what they had been taught but also to showcase their interests and talents.

Analysis of the data revealed improvement in the overall school environment, communication between school and home, the communication skills of students, support for a school–home–community partnership, and attendance of parents at school meetings. Display of the diverse interests/talents of students was also staged.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The writer's professional position is a speech-language pathologist. She is employed at the only remaining vocational center for mentally disabled students in her school district. All other special education centers in her district have now been converted to regular schools (where disabled and nondisabled students attend the same school). The writer's workplace has recently been cited for operating a segregated facility--a violation of Public Law 101-476--and must convert to a regular school effective August 17, 1994. PL - 101-476 is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The law requires that individuals with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled when at all possible (34 CFR 300.500 (A) (1) [Least Restrictive Environment]).

The vocational center is located in the second largest school district in a southern state, next door to the farm of a major university. The city has a population of three hundred and eighty thousand and school enrollment, including public and private, is approximately eighty-two thousand.

The center is situated approximately five minutes away from the main campus of the university. The circumstances are such that the disabled students do not come in contact with their neighbors and nondisabled peers on a regular basis. However, weekly community-based education is provided for them--but may or may not include a trip to the university. A few (not more more than six) students are selected

each year to take swimming lessons at the university's swimming pool for individuals with disabilities.

All students are bused in, and most of them are from low socioeconomic, inner-city neighborhoods. Most of the students are black and live in households headed by single parents. Many of these families are considered poor and disadvantaged. Fewer than half of the students are white, and a noticeable number of both black and white students live in group homes.

School district employees serving this center include 17 full-time teachers, four itinerant teachers, 14 full-time teacher aides (seven of whom also serve as school bus attendants), a principal, a secretary, one part-time custodian and two full-time custodians, six bus drivers who transport the students back and forth to school and a cafeteria worker who serves meals (that have been prepared at a nearby high school) to the students. The writer's school does not have a librarian, school counselor, child welfare and attendance agent, assistant principal, or dean of students.

The 182 students at this facility (ages 14-22) have been classified as mildly, moderately, or severely mentally disabled. Four of the students are also classified as having other health impairments. Although most of the students enrolled at the center have difficulty communicating, only 43 of them are currently classified as having speech impairments, and those impairments include language, articulation, and voice and fluency disorders. Five of the students are nonverbal.

The curriculum provides for all students enrolled at the center to be taught vocational skills. They also receive training in family living, horticulture, and

community survival skills. Fewer than five of these students can read above the first-grade level, and only about five of them can read at all. A remarkable number of these students, however, have been able to do well in visual and performing arts, crafts, dance, drama, rap, bodybuilding, lifetime sports, animal and plant care, lawn service, food service, and housekeeping and janitorial tasks.

The Author's Work Setting and Role

The writer's role as speech-language pathologist in this work lsetting includes providing diagnostic and remediation services for 43 students classified as mentally disabled in the mild/moderate/severe range. The students range in age from 14 to 22. As part of her job description and professional responsibilities, the writer: identifies and evaluates students with speech, language, and related problems; plans and conducts activities to improve a student's speaking, listening, signing, and other language skills; collaborates with parents, families, caregivers, teachers, and other professionals in understanding and meeting the students' speech, language, and academic needs; monitors and documents the effectiveness of treatment and student progress; writes reports and does other required clerical work; educates parents, teachers, and administrators about communication development and disorders; and trains students, teachers, and parents on the use of augmentative and alternative communication devices for those students who are unable to speak. In addition, she serves on three school committees: Social Needs, Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday Observance, and the Graduation Ceremony Committee. She has morning and afternoon bus duty once a week and recreation duty

five days a week. She also serves as Building Representative for her local teachers union.

Chapter II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

In the writer's workplace, increased parental involvement will improve the students' communication skills. There appears to be very little carryover to the home environment of skills taught in the therapy setting. Andrews, Andrews and Shearer (1989) conducted a study to collect information about characteristics, attitudes, and participation of families whose children receive speech-language services in schools. The results showed that the majority of the parents surveyed desire family involvement. Based on their findings, the authors concluded that when family resources are utilized, speech-language pathologists can expect to increase their own effectiveness and to expand treatment options for students in the instructional setting and in carryover to other environments. The problem is that many parents, guardians, surrogates, and caregivers of mentally disabled students with speech impairments (ages 14-22) do not attend school meetings and functions. Parents who do attend meetings and other functions are usually middle class and will respond readily to invitations; not the poor--whose children are in the majority at the center school--seldom come.

Problem Documentation

There is much evidence to support the problem of poor parental involvement. Attendance records indicate that 11 of 40 families whose children were enrolled in speech-language therapy were represented at three meetings held during the 1991-

1992 school year. Furthermore, there was no plan or strategy in place to insure that parents, guardians, surrogates, or caretakers would attend.

School records indicate that eight of forty families whose children were enrolled in speech-language therapy were represented at individualized education program conferences during the 1991-1992 school year. In addition, a review of printed programs over the last several years indicates that school programs are structured so that students often are not given opportunities to demonstrate their talents; consequently, parents seldom get involved in facilitating such programs.

Although the school conducts meetings (primarily for remedial purposes), there is no organized PTA/PTO, as reported in an interview with the principal. The principal, however, revealed that she is partial to one-on-one meetings with parents because in such meetings she has been successful. She is opposed to large group meetings, in which she has reportedly been less than effective. In a telephone interview, the past president of the school district PTA president, surmised that some school principals do not encourage organizing a PTA because they may not want to have another program or group to manage. In interviews, several teachers at the writer's school indicated that further parental involvement on any level would reduce the administration's control.

Another problem is that all school programs and most of the parent meetings are held during the daytime, when most working parents are unable to attend. This may have very well been the case with the school's top student in the graduating class of 1992. This particular student had won many honors, including the

Brotherhood/Sisterhood Award and Courtesy Award, and she had been queen of the sweetheart ball. Yet her parents were not present for any of these events; they also missed her graduation.

Although the school does publish a monthly newsletter, this communication is basically a one-way system and may not always represent a collaborative viewpoint or an opportunity for the school to receive news from the home.

The following example may have been the result of one-way communication. During the 1994 graduation exercises, a homeroom teacher, paying tribute to one of the 19 graduating seniors, announced to the audience of more than 300 that one of the graduates was the youngest of five children when in fact he was the youngest of 16. Thirteen of his siblings are still living. The student's family ex[ressed disappointment that the teachers did not know this after having worked with their son for seven years.

Causative Analysis

Several causes of the problem of poor parental involvement are documented. One major cause is that families do not feel welcome at the school. While there is indeed a welcome mat at the front entrance of the school, there is no visible sign or banner that says "welcome" to anyone-not the students, not the parents, not the teachers, not even visitors, not anyone. At the annual open house, there is no general meeting where parents can receive warm greetings collectively. Instead, as soon as the parents enter the building, they are given their child's class schedule and instructed to follow it. When the bell rings an hour later, everyone goes home. There is no

reception, refreshments, or socializing. Another sign that visitors are uncome is the way IEP conferences are scheduled and conducted by the principal and the teachers: if the parent appears to have influence and could cause a problem, all of the teachers of that parent's child attend, but if the parent is poor and belongs to a minority race or ethnic group, only his/her child's homeroom teacher will attend, and the homeroom teacher will share the written objectives that he/she has collected from the child's other teachers.

Another cause of poor parental involvement is that the family, school, and community have low expectations of students with disabilities. They know from their own observations that the students who spend seven years attending classes at the center and at other schools like it usually find themselves with no place to go after graduation. They have spent too much time determining what these students cannot do and not enough time focusing on and nurturing what they can do. For example, a father did not know that his moderately mentally disabled, visually impaired son could read the newspaper (with assistance). A mother did not know that her son could and did create a rap poem as a tribute to his slain friend; school personnel did not know either. Several waiters at a local restaurant were surprised to see that students with disabilities could place their own food orders, eat, and interact socially with each other in an orderly and very well-mannered way. Public officials and philanthropists did not realize that artwork created by disabled students could be newsworthy and marketable. Several teachers underestimated a disabled student's singing and acting abilities. Finally, the students themselves did not and still do not seem to realize what

remarkable people skills they possess and what wonderful human beings they are. People with diabilities are easy to please and are usually very appreciative of anything one does for them. They are some of the most compassionate people this writer has ever met.

Perhaps the most visible evidence of low expectations of the disabled students is not only poor parent participation, but also the limited opportunities at school for students to express and share their interests and talents and the fact that after graduation most students have no place to go. A few of them will achieve competitive employment and a few of them will achieve supervised employment, but the majority of the disabled students will end up on long waiting lists to get into post-school training programs. Sometimes the wait can be up to three years. It is during this waiting period that many of them sit idle at home and succumb to welfare dependency, having babies out of wedlock and getting caught up in the criminal justice system. This dilemma has its origin in low expectations and a poor support system for these students. Dumas (1993) suggests that if schools would give students the opportunity not only to practice the skills taught, but to demonstrate their interests and talents, "All students would be gifted in some way." The writer is firmly convinced that Dumas' suggestion is correct.

Learning style is also important in finding and developing one's talents. Dunn, Dunn, and Treffinger (1992) discuss the importance of learning style and present research that explains the feasibility of teaching students either by implementing their

individual learning styles or by teaching them to teach themselves as they capitalize on their personal strengths.

Transportation to and from the school poses a tremendous problem for the parents. Many of them are poor and do not own a car. Some of the parents do not know how to drive, so even if they did have their own transportation, they would have to depend on someone else to drive them to the school. The city transit system does dispatch city buses in the vicinity of the center school, but only during working hours and not after 6:00 p.m. Some students live long distances from the school--as far away as 25 miles even in other surrounding cities. Further, since there is no organized PTA/PTO or regularly scheduled meetings, there seems to be little or no opportunity for families to meet other families and perhaps establish the necessary relationships that will lead to carpools and other benefits of coming together on a regular basis and networking.

Another contributing factor to the parent involvement problem is the difficulty parents have arranging and financing child care for younger siblings. Often the financial resources and support systems are just not available to them. Traditionally, the schools have not provided this service to the families of the children they serve.

Finally, working parents are often unable to attend school meetings and programs held during the daytime. Presently, all of the center school's programs--including the senior prom--are held during the day. Although one of the few parent group meetings held at night drew the best attendance, all such meetings since have

been scheduled during the day--when it was most convenient for staff but very inconvenient for working parents to attend.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature chronicles the historical events of handicapped students and their struggle for a free and appropriate education, with parents as their most dedicated advocates.

In 1975, Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), was enacted by Congress. This law was originally enacted to guarantee the right of all children with disabilities to receive the free and appropriate education previously denied them. In October, 1990, this law was amended by Public Law 101-476 to become the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The law requires that individuals with disabilities be educated with children who are not disabled when at all possible. Additionally, PL 101-476 guarantees the rights of parents to fair evaluation procedures, provider for involvement of parents in the, and evaluation of their child's program, and calls for set procedures for resolving conflicts between families and school.

However, the prevailing attitude of early educators in this country toward educating disabled children in schools was one of separation or segregation (Rothstein, 1990). These believed that a policy of separation and segregation relieved by removing disabled chidren to special classes. This policy was also embraced by the courts in early attempts to litigate this issue.

In the early 1900s, the debate in academic circles regarding the education of the disabled had evolved to a point of trying to determine whether a child fell within the classifications of educable or uneducable. If a child was determined to be educable, he or she was admitted to special classes, while those labeled uneducable were excluded from public schools. However, only a few states formally introduced classes for the mentally impaired, and then the classes were only for those who functioned at a high level. The children who were classified as being uneducable often ended up being warehoused away into institutional settings.

Initially parents of these children were poor advocates for better treatment, for they were erroneously led to believe that their children would not be able to lead meaningful lives (Cichon, 1987)

However, But, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, parents of handicapped children began to assert themselves, and demanding special enhancements. They now realized that their children were not getting the services that they were entitled to under the Constitution. As a result of their collective voice, a public awareness of the needs of the handicapped child was brought to the forefront. This new awareness brought on new and innovative techniques in the delivery of educational services to the disabled child as well as an attitude that mentally disabled children are developing individuals with the capacity to grow and learn (Cichon, 1987)

After the United States Supreme Court handed down the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954, advocates for disabled children began to view the court's rationale as a legal basis for their attack on exclusionary policies. In Brown, the court

concluded that the doctrine of separate but equal is a denial of the equal protection of the laws, guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. The court noted that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal (Cichon, 1987).

In the case of Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Pennsylvania, plaintiffs (PARC) asserted the equal protection argument against the state's statutory scheme that excluded disabled children from public education, while providing a free public education for children who were not disabled. The attorneys representing the plaintiffs recognized the far-reaching implications that this case carried and endeavored to prove, overwhelmingly, that every disabled child could benefit from education (Cichon, 1987).

Cichon furthe noted that during a preliminary hearing, PARC expert witnesses established that, with the appropriate education, 29 disabled children out of 30 could achieve self-sufficiency; 25 of them in an ordinary way in the marketplace and four in a sheltered environment. The remaining one of every 30 was capable of achieving a significant degree of self-care. This very powerful testimony led to a consent between the parties, and the agreement specifically noted that all disabled persons were educable.

Through it all, parents have been their disabled children's persistent and most vocal advocates. They are finally being acknowledged for their role in helping to solve the ancient problem of educating children with disabilities. Parents, according to Lipsky (1989), although sometimes viewed negatively, are increasingly being recognized for their roles as decision makers, advocates, protectors, and teachers.

Lipsky reminds us that parents were the dominant force behind the passage of PL 94-142 and in safeguarding the law from the Reagan Administration's early efforts to dismantle it.

Parents of children with disabilities formed a partnership with educators when the program design for PL 94-142 required that individualized education plans (IEP) be written for special education students (Berger, 1991). The IEP is the key element in defining whether the disabled child is being properly served under the law. If the parents disagree with the proposed IEP, the Act affords them an opportunity to voice their disagreement through administrative and judicial proceedings.

When parents and schools work together, this experience yields the strengths of the home and the expertise of the school in an effective partnership (Berger, 1991). Parents' contacts with teachers can provide valuable information that is helpful to parents in living with their chidren at home (Kindred, Bagin, & Gallagher, 1984). Parents often need help with parenting skills such as understanding and relating to their own children at various developmental stages--especially adolescence. Parent training in certain programs is available in some schools, and those parents who wish to do so are assisted in working on skills with their child at home.

As Burger points out, if the school wants information from parents, one of the fastest ways to obtain it is to have a meeting in which the parents feel comfortable enough to express themselves freely and honestly. The literature reveals the causes of poor parental involvement to be primarily social. This becomes quite evident as Bos and Vaughn (1988) cite effective communication skills as the fundamental need in

working successfully with parents. They argue that the principles of communication that are usually not implemented appropriately include acceptance, listening, questioning, providing encouragement, staying directed, and developing a working alliance.

Often warn Bos and Vaughn, in the IEP conference parents may detect that some teachers do not really want to see them during conferences, but are merely fulfilling a requirement. Lack of acceptance sets up roadblocks and prevents maximum participation by parents. But there are also some teachers who know how to extend and project their acceptance and interest and even put themselves in the parents' role--as this writer frequently finds herself doing. When this is done, it is easy to show respect for another person's knowledge, diversity, and need to be seen and heard and introduced or presented to others in a positive manner. It becomes a constant reminder to treat others the way you wish to be treated.

Effective listening explain Bos and Vaughn, is not just waiting politely for the person to finish; rather, it is getting the real message from the content and feelings that accompany the content and allowing the speaker to validate or correct what the listener has summarized. Effective questioning is knowing what questions may be open ended and which should be closed. With the former, sentences may begin with "How," "What," "Tell me about," and so forth.

Furthermore, encouragement is offered so that a conference or conversation with parents can begin and end on a positive and sincere note. Parents need encouragement from teachers; brings about empowerment for parents. So often this

element is missing from conferences. Teachers spend most of the conference time explaining what teachers have done, what teachers plan to do and what the students have failed to do. Staying directed requires following the parents lead as they discuss their own children, whom they know better than anyone else knows them. It also requires keeping the discussion focused even when you are required to address other issues that may arise.

Finally, in developing a working alliance, it is essential that every possible avenue be exhausted by teachers and school personnel to communicate to parents that everyone is working toward a common goal--utilizing the contributions of family, school, and community to effectively meet the individual needs of all the students.

Harry, Torguson, Katkavich, and Guerreo (1993) note that as the socioeconomic gap between teachers and their students widens, teachers fear crossing what they perceive as barriers to communication with poor families from racial groups other than their own. Some teachers in the writer's workplace have admitted on many occasions that they grew up without being exposed to certain multicultural and socioeconomic issues, and they find it very difficult to be really sensitive to different family needs, resources, and interests. This admission is important because it does signal a start. But it is not enough. Steps must be taken by those teachers to rid themselves of their insensitivity. After all, there are students whose backgrounds may be very different from their teachers, but those students, with fewer resources, have moved beyond the admission stage to the final stage of listening to, talking with, caring about, and trusting their teachers. Even when the students know that they are

being ignored, slighted, and treated unfairly, many of them continue to exercise a spirit of warmth, cooperation, and goodwill.

Parent–professional communication barriers include concerns such as stressful life circumstances and a lack of confidence in working with school personnel. Marital difficulties, financial problems or the challenge of trying to cope with one or more developmentally disabled children and their siblings can seriously interfere with communication.

Dr. James P. Comer, in an interview with Nick Chiles (1993) for Essence magazine, puts forth the notion that poor parents do not get involved with their children's education because the schools have sent them a negative message implying that parents are not really wanted in the schools, are unqualified to help teachers, and often make it awkward for teachers to interact with them in the school setting. When parents stay away, the schools then accuse parents of not being interested. Dr. Comer urges schools to create a climate that welcomes people, makes them feel free to contribute, and assures them that they have a role to play and that they belong.

Astove and McLanhan (1991) present research which reveals that children who live with single parents and stepparents during adolescence receive less encouragement and less help with school work than children who live with both natural parents. As mentioned earlier, many of the students at the writer's school come from homes headed by single parents and a noticeable number come from homes headed by stepparents.

Hendry, Roberts, Glendinning and Coleman (1992) found that among 180 adolescents from one Scottish secondary school the most significant family member and unrelated person in young people's lives were [mother] and (same sex) [friend]. In spite of these findings, the research shows that some fathers would like an even greater role. Little (1993) presents information that fathers of children with disabilities would like greater involvement than they currently have in meeting the needs of their children. Even when these fathers carry out their recognized roles, it is difficult for them to receive credit for their efforts. There appears to be a lack of routines to foster father/male involvement in programs for disabled children.

In a study that examined the court records of 206 seriously abused or neglected children and their families, in over half of the records, parents had been diagnosed as having an emotional disorder and/or low intelligence (Taylor, 1991). Survival skills, however, are not only an important part of the school curriculum, but they are also a high priority for many of the students and their parents. Hamre-Nietupski (1993) shares information that supports a trend observed for parental preferences to increase for functional life skills as their son/daughter increased in age. Heward and Orlansky (1992) also note possible issues encountered by parents and siblings at different life-cycle stages of an individual with disabilities.

The topical areas touched upon in the writer's search of the literature appeared to be logistics, psychological, and social concerns, and economics. We live in a society that has a history of social inequality: slavery, the passage of blacks to

America, segregation, racial discrimination, and religious, gender, and disability bias – only a few to mention.

Students, schedules, present particularly at the middle and high school levels, logistical problems that interfere with parent–school collaboration and communication. Because students now spend their day with as many as seven teachers rather than just one or two as they did in elementary school, parents cannot access them as they did in the elementary schools. Some observers note that parents may feel that no one person in the school really knows their child and each teacher has so many more students for whom he/she is responsible. Often times, the parents look to the school counselor to fill their void. The school counselor, whose job it is to monitor the academic and social performance of each student, has been given the monumental task of monitoring hundreds of students. The writer's workplace does not have a counselor on staff, consequently, we do not have that one person who is responsible for monitoring student performances.

Another related problem found in the literature includes the size and design of the school building itself, which can be both physically and mentally intimidating to parents. Location of the schools is also a concern that may prevent parents from visiting schools. Schools for upper grades are often further away from where students may live, sometimes in strange neighborhoods. Parents become fearful for various reasons, including the level of violence in the schools. According to the Expulsion and Suspension Report for the writer's school district in 1992–1993, a total of 210 weapons were found in the schools that are located in her district.

The curriculum content, some observers explain, also appears to cause a barrier between parent and school. There are now more advanced and technical subjects than there were many of the parents were in school. Hence, parents may feel uncomfortable discussing subject matter with their children, not to mention their teachers, and when parents of middle and high school students who are in the labor force, divorced, or single, they may not have the time or the energy to spare for school-related activities. Parents who work outside the home may not be able to leave their jobs to attend school functions. If child-care services for young children are not affordable, this may serve to prevent parents from becoming involved in school activities.

From a psychological viewpoint, autonomy is central to the adolescent who wishes to manage and plan his or her own agenda independently. They start to rely less on their parents and more on themselves and their peers. Although adolescents develop more independence from their parents, they do not wish to be abandoned by them. Adolescents still need their parents' expectations, guidance, and limit-setting (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986).

Some parents do not know how to show the school or their children that they are interested; and at some schools personnel do not know how to respond to parents once the parents have expressed interest. Transportation to middle and high schools that are no longer neighborhood schools can also be a problem for parents.

Chapter III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of education is to prepare the students for life in a postschool environment. To do this successfully, students must be exposed to many different experiences with many different people in many different environments. With the right kind of nurturing--respect, high expectations, guidance, and support--students can discover and use their gifts and talents to become valued members of society. Therefore, parental and family involvement in the schools must begin at the pre-school level and continue through the secondary-school level.

The goals and expectations of the practicum are to increase the attendance and participation of families and caregivers of students who are mentally disabled in the mild/moderate/severe range with speech impairments (ages 14-22) at school meetings, programs, and other functions.

Expected Outcomes

The writer has projected the following outcomes for the practicum:

1. Family/caregiver attendance at meetings will increase to 30.
2. Parents will attend at least one individualized education conference during the school year.
3. Parents and teachers will collaborate to develop school programs which will allow students the opportunities to demonstrate their

gifts/talents/interests in various areas (music, literature, visual and performing arts, sports, fashions, culinary skills, sign language, technology, etc.)

Measurement of Outcomes

The outcomes of the practicum will be measured by attendance rosters, records of student achievement of IEP objectives as noted in the progress reports, observation and the participants' response to a questionnaire. The writer will therefore compare pre- and postpracticum data to determine whether or not the outcomes were achieved. The writer will pay particular attention to the results of all participants having worked together to provide the students the opportunity to showcase their skills and talents, while at the same time reinforcing their educational achievements and building their self-esteem.

The writer has designed and will use the following evaluation instruments:

1. Family Information and Involvement Survey (see Appendix A)
2. Communication Observation Sheet (see Appendix B)
3. Communication Observation Summary Sheet (see Table 1)

Table 1

Communication Observation Summary Sheet

Areas and Items	Percentage Achieved not at all	Percentage Achieved moderately	Percentage Achieved very much
1. School atmosphere	0%	14%	86%
2. Two-way communication	0%	10%	90%
3. School supports families and community	0%	10%	90%
4. Families support school and community	0%	10%	90%
5. Community supports school and families	0%	10%	90%
6. Student improvement in communication skills	0%	31%	69%
7. Meetings next year	more 66%	fewer ____%	same 34%
8. Families ought to be involved	less 0%	more 93%	same 07%
9. Suggestions for future meetings:			
10. Ideas gleaned from project:			

Chapter IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Parents/guardians/surrogates/caregivers of developmentally disabled students with speech impairments (ages 14–22) did not attend school meetings and functions.

It is a foregone conclusion that the home environment, attitudes, and participation of parents are paramount to the child's social and educational development. Gough (cited in Gearhart, Mullen, & Gearheart, 1993, p. 476) makes this concept very clear when he says, "Effective parent involvement programs acknowledge the fact that parents are a child's earliest and most influential teachers. Trying to educate the young without help and support from the home is akin to trying to rake leaves in a high wind," but in order to gain the necessary help and support from the home, the school must restructure strategies to gain the trust and cooperation of parents.

Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms (1986) purport that schools enjoying a compatible relationship with parents adhere to a fundamental set of principles. First, the entire school atmosphere must be one of openness, helpfulness, and friendliness. Second, when the schools communicate with parents--regardless of the nature of the exchange--this communication must be "frequent, clear and two-way." And last, parents are respected and acknowledged for the complimentary role they play in their children's education.

Kerr and Nelson (1989) offer two general objectives for working with parents. They include training parents to address challenging behavior in the home or

neighborhood, and engendering parental support for classroom objectives. Vukelich (1993) notes that parental involvement can come in the form of discussing experiences in school and education planning as well as assisting with home assignments. When the goal of school officials is to increase parental involvement, the officials must work to overcome passivity. Parents must be brought together to establish behavior standards and to have them discover the facilitating role of technology (Coleman, 1991).

When parents, teachers, and other caring adults work cooperatively with schools, they provide children the support they need to succeed. Parents provide such services as tutoring and mentoring, and they also help with curriculum development, assessment, and the instruction program (Comer, 1993).

Researchers at the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning found that when parents are knowledgeable, supportive, and involved with their children, these attributes serve to foster more positive behaviors, better attitudes, and higher aspirations. Their study also showed that, while many parents are willing to become involved with their children's learning, parents receive very little and sometimes no encouragement from the schools. The researchers identified five levels of parental involvement that can be applied to the home-school relationship. These are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home and representing other parents and the community (Instructor, 1993). These levels of family involvement, if promoted, can lead to effective practices and outcomes for parents, students, and teachers.

Davies (cited in Gearhart, Mullen, & Gearheart, 1993, p.476) proposes a new trend to broaden the definitions of parental involvement as follows: Use the term family instead of parents because, in today's society, the most important adults in a child's life may be grandparents, aunts, uncles, or sometimes a neighbor who is the primary caregiver. Davis points out that [family involvment] should include members from community agencies, since those agencies provide services to meet the unique needs of the students. Another point Davies makes is that school events and outreach programs should not be restricted to the school environment because requiring parents to visit the school may prove insufficient for all practical purposes. Davies makes yet another point by emphasizing that schools should not be content with involving only those parents who have always been involved, but schools should give special attention to those parents who are poor, who have never been involved, who have problems speaking standard English, or who are afraid of--and feel uncomfortable around--school officials. The final point Davies makes is that parental participation encompasses more than the school's academic program; it also addresses family concerns, which sometimes have to take priority.

In a bold move to increase parental involvement in schools, a local teachers union was proposing that legislation be offered to require businesses to let parents have time off from work with pay to visit their children's schools (1993, The Advocate).

The Parent Institute (1991) explains that helping children develop the ability to communicate is a basic and important part of a parent's job and that children who can

express their thoughts and ideas through words do better in school and on the job. The Parent Institute offers a variety of ways parents can talk to and listen to children, including new ways to say "I love you,"--as a parent's love is fundamental to a child's self-esteem. Communication between parents and children can be challenging, in that both children and parents often feel that they simply are not being heard.

One way to enhance greater communication, learning activities, and socialization at home, at school, and between home and school for verbal and nonverbal students is through the effective use of technology and its application to the enhancement of communication disorders.

Nameth (1993) alerts educators, parents, and students alike that computer technology is here for the rest of our lives and that being computer literate in this day and age is as essential to success as having a college degree. She conceptionalizes that teachers who use technology may very well, in the long run, outdistance those who do not for just as computer technology engages students, it empowers teachers as well.

Nameth presents information based on the summaries of 86 studies that support the use of technology as an important learning tool. Technology helps the students accomplish more, helps the students to have better self-images and attitudes about learning, and improves the ability of students to interact better with their peers and with their teachers.

Nameth concludes by pointing out that in business in industry, and in the home, technology has been institutionalized, but in the schools, it has been unstable due to scarcity of resources such as time and money.

Microcomputers present the possibility for increasing the effectiveness of language intervention for adolescents who have language-learning problems. Some of the advantages include: consistent and objective performance standards, accuracy in recording and evaluating student responses, integration of visual and auditory stimuli that can motivate and reinforce learning, and the potential for enabling a larger number of students to learn more efficiently and more effectively (Nippold, Schwarz, & Lewis, 1992).

One promising application of microcomputers in the area of communication disorders is in the treatment of language comprehension deficits in older children and adolescents. Mizuko (1993) discusses the application of personal computers as augmentative and alternative communication aids. His article emphasizes the opportunities that both technologies can offer students such as the ones with whom the writer works--students who have speech and motor skill impairments and are unable to use standard access methods such as the unadapted keyboard and mouse. These benefits include high quality speech synthesis, unlimjted vocabulary, various input modes, printer capabilities, and portability.

Mizuko feels that in addition to its light weight, durability, and reasonable cost, the personal computer if adapted with special hardware and software, can provide viable solutions for individuals who have never before been able to speak. At least

five students at the writer's school are non-verbal, and although another five of them may have some vocalization skills, their speech is still considered to be unintelligible.

Additional benefits the personal computer offers students, according to Mizuko, includes educational, vocational, and environmental control applications. Clients are provided with an all-important means of drill and practice instruction and are in the position of practicing independently, learning new skills, and increasing the amount of drill and practice time they receive.

Mizuko concludes with the suggestion that these technological innovations offer persons with speech and/or motor skill impairments new and improved channels for independence and parity with their peers who are physically capable. This suggestion supports the school's mission, which is based on the philosophy that all students can learn regardless of their handicap or disability.

Since most of the students at the writer's workplace have mental and/or motor skill disabilities, the literature supports an array of adaptive devices that can enhance the use of technology. For those students with communication problems, Hesser (1993) mentions the Braille 'N' Speak, which is a pocket-sized, battery-operated notetaker with a Braille keyboard and speech output, developed by Blazie Engineers. The Light-Talker, by Prentke Romich Company, is a device that allows non-speaking students to talk through the use of special software. The power pad, echo speaker, and touch window are also effective technological devices suited to meeting the needs of non-speaking individuals.

O'Neil (1993) as well as some other experts believe that technology can contribute extensively to the active experimental learning that the education theorist, John Dewey, advocated many years ago. Dewey's theories on learning by practical experience are supported by cognitive research revealing that students learn better when they find solutions to real life problems instead of spending time addressing the hypothetical ones. Speech, writing, and other motor skill impairments are indeed real-life problems that can be treated through the use of computers and technology, as these tools create conditions in which students may have personalized opportunities to learn by doing.

Citing the implementation of a parent/family intervention program as one of the major challenges facing the speech-language pathologist in the schools, Masterson, Swirbul, and Noble (1990) developed the Computer-Generated Information Packets for Parents (CIPP) to raise the consciousness of families about the nature and causes of communication disorders and how best to facilitate their remediation.

Quick (1993) believes that the use of an augmentative system permits the child to actively communicate, stimulates socialization and personal well-being, and probably enhances the child's educational growth. She further contends that parental involvement is crucial to the child with cerebral palsy because parents learn how to facilitate their child's use of an augmentative device in all aspects of daily living. The parents of a cerebral palsied child play a vital role once a device is recommended. Specifically, parents must create a vocabulary needs list, aid the speech pathologist in

collecting pictures, motivate and encourage the child to use the device during all periods of the day, and be trained to use and program the device.

Romaski, Sevcik, and Wilkinson (1994) suggest that mentally retarded students with little or no functional speech who used the System for Augmenting Language (SAL) as their primary means of communication were both effective and successful in conversations. For the nonverbal student, there has been a shift of focus from wanting an individual to speak to wanting an individual to communicate. To do this, augmentative systems or devices have been employed (Cooney, 1985).

Viewing communication interactions as a means of professionally addressing the effects of disability, Ferguson (1994) concluded that the real focus is not so much to improve communication but rather to establish membership in society.

Description of Selected Solution

The writer generated several ideas as a result of the review of literature.

1. Students would keep speech notebooks that contain activities, lessons, and creative ideas designed to enhance communication skills in all program areas across the curriculum and in the home. The notebooks would be simple, spiral-bound composition tablets with four sections to address (1) the student and his/her family, (2) the school and all its programs, (3) the community, and (4) communication between school and home. The students would receive one hour of individualized or small-group therapy in two 30-minute weekly sessions. They also would benefit from whole language in a classroom and community-based instructional setting once a week. Time would be provided for collaborative planning with teachers and parents and also

for making home/community visits and reviewing the notebooks. The notebooks would help to better coordinate the students' different subjects and teach the students to be responsible for transporting them from school to home and back, doing the homework, and using and taking care of them. Not only would the notebooks provide opportunities for students, teachers, and families to participate in the identification and solution to educational and social challenges, but the notebooks would also serve as a frame of reference and help to facilitate the all-important two-way communication between the school and the home.

2. The writer would provide workshops and seminars that targeted parental and community involvement in teaching effective communication skills and stimulated carryover of skills taught in the therapy setting to other environments. Parents and teachers would be invited and encouraged to attend three monthly meetings/seminars/workshops accompanied by breakfast/lunch/dinner depending on a time that would be convenient for them. The purposes of the seminars would be to raise parental awareness about the nature and causes of communication problems and to show ways in which they could participate in the remediation process. Emphasis would also be placed on listening to parents' concerns and assisting them on effective ways to talk and listen to their children. The community would be involved as volunteers and sponsors.

3. The writer would develop student learning activities that welcome parent/teacher/community participation, including--among others--a talent fair. Each parent, student, and teacher would be asked to share with the speech pathologist the

student's interests/gifts/talents. Each parent/teacher would be asked to share his/her talents as well. Then all participants would be asked to hone/develop their talent/skills to produce a performance/product that would be showcased at a "talent fair." Families, students, school officials, community volunteers, and representatives from local businesses and the media would be invited to attend and participate. Prizes and awards will be presented to outstanding talents, and certificates of award would be presented to each program participant at the school's annual awards day program.

4. News from the Speech-Language Therapy Department highlighting student achievements would be published and circulated within the school district and the community via the school newsletter (and/or a newsletter which would be created for the Department) and other news media. News would be encouraged and accepted from school, home, and the community.

Where transportation was determined to be a problem, a volunteer car pool and the church van would be used to get parents to and from the school. Parents would be encouraged to bring younger siblings to the meetings, and child care services would be provided with the cooperation of students in the adult responsibility classes and of community volunteers. School meetings/programs/seminars/workshops would be scheduled at a time to accommodate working parents.

The writer would also take steps to insure a smooth and effective practicum period. A big sign reading "Welcome students, parents, teachers, and visitors" would be placed over the speech room door. The practicum would commence with an orientation for teachers and staff, followed by a telephone conference with each

participating parent. Volunteers from the community and local colleges and universities would be invited to participate. The practicum project would be evaluated, using a questionnaire developed by the writer.

A mini-grant proposal would be written to help defray costs of notebooks, printing, seminars/workshops, programs, meals, transportation, child care, etc. The practicum, however, was designed to move forward even if the proposal were not funded.

Report of Action Taken

The implementation began three weeks behind schedule due to the school's transition from a special education center to an alternative school for "at risk" students. All of the school's meetings, in the beginning, were related to the transition, leaving little or no time at all for the writer to present her practicum.

Following this brief delay, the writer spent the first three weeks presenting her practicum first to the Principal and the teachers and two days later to the teacher aides. Via telephone conferences, the writer then presented her program to each of the 43 families whose members were enrolled in speech-language therapy. During this conference, the writer was able to introduce as well as conduct the Family Information and Involvement Survey (FIIS) (see Appendix A). A follow-up letter inviting families to the school's Open House and program informational meeting was sent home. At that meeting, the Principal welcomed parents, introduced teachers, gave an update on the status of the transition, and gave parents time to visit classrooms and confer with teachers. Subsequently, family members of the speech therapy students met in the

auditorium with the writer to discuss the project. The writer addressed the student's communication problems and described how parents/families could facilitate the treatment process. Information folders/packets were given to all attendees and were sent the next day to families not represented. Child care services were provided, utilizing community volunteers as supervisors and students from the school's Adult Responsibility class as sitters. Transportation was also provided for those who needed it. Since most parents preferred an evening meeting, the breakfast meeting idea was not pursued. Attending the meeting were: 45 parents, 18 students/siblings, 16 teachers, and two volunteers. The writer thanked the families, faculty members, students, and volunteers for their attendance and participation (see Appendix C).

During the fourth, fifth, and sixth weeks of the program, the writer conducted therapy sessions for the students, prepared and issued "Let's Communicate" notebooks to each student, (see Appendix D) reviewed the talent/interest information from families collected through the FIIS during the telephone conference, assisted students and parents in developing those talents, taught whole language activities in the classroom and in community-based settings, and sent home the students' (first nine weeks of school) progress reports.

During the seventh, eighth, and ninth weeks of the program, several parent teacher conferences were scheduled. The writer continued with student therapy sessions; with lessons in the use of whole language in classroom and community settings, and with assisting participants with talent/interest development projects. Since many of the parents work and had expressed a desire for evening meetings, the

writer was committed to meeting that desire. However, the administration and the Office of Special Education called a special mid-morning October meeting for parents of graduating seniors only, and this prevented the writer from scheduling a second meeting in the same month.

During the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth weeks of the program, the writer continued to conduct speech-language therapy sessions, to teach whole language therapy sessions, to teach whole language in the classroom and in community settings, to assist participants with talent/interest development projects, and to hold parent/teacher conferences. A third parent meeting was not held due to scheduling problems. The writer made two home visits, sent to parents/guardians a letter announcing a talent fair (see appendix C), prepared a photographic display and a videotape of the students performing various skills/talents, put on a talent fair--that included a program, an art exhibit, a culinary exhibit, a photo gallery, a fashion/extravaganza, a videotape production, and a Thanksgiving dinner (see Appendix E). The writer used a $1,500.00 grant to help defray the costs incurred in the program, and volunteers and sponsors helped insure the success of the project. In addition to the grant, the writer was able to get a lot of help including: a local barber college gave complimentary haircuts to all the male student participants in the talent fair; a local branch of an international bottling company donated a variety of soft drinks; the students in the Home Economics class made pumpkin tart pies and constructed a candy-house for the culinary arts display; a local branch of a national electronics chain provided the school with the big screen television; the owner of a

fashionable boutique provided evening wear for several of the parents to model, the director of a personal development and enrichment program, her daughter and two students from a local university teamed together to teach the students modeling techniques; members of a local dance club performed an exciting clog dance. The principal was one of the performers. Two women from a local Baptist church's missionary society supervised the child casre center and two other women from the same Baptist church helped to put together the Let's Communicate notebooks.

The COS Instrument was used to evaluate the program. In Table 1, the COSS was used to report the findings of the COS in percentages.

Chapter V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Only a few of the parents/families of developmentally disabled students with speech impairments (ages 14–22) at the writer's workplace would attend school meetings, programs, and other functions prior to the implementation of this practicum. A systematic plan of action to involve families in a program designed to improve the communication and social skills of the students was determined to be effective and beneficial not only to the students targeted, but to all participating parties as well: teachers, families, and volunteers.

According to Nicolosi, Harryman, and Kresheck (1989), communication is any means by which individuals convey experiences, ideas, knowledge, and feelings to another--including speech, sign language, gestures, and writing. With this definition in view, families, teachers, and volunteers gave students support and guidance not only in practicing the skills they had been taught but also in mastering the skills necessary to identify, develop, and showcase their interests, strengths, and talents.

Results

One expected outcome subsequent to implementation was that parent/family attendance at school meetings would increase to 30. This objective was achieved at the very first meeting, which was scheduled in conjunction with open house. Forty-five of the 82 families were represented; of that number, 39 had a child enrolled in speech-language therapy. Pre-practicum data indicated that only 11 out of 40

families having members enrolled in speech-language therapy were represented at three meetings held during the 1991-1992 school year.

2. A second expected outcome was that parents/families would attend at least one individualized education conference during the school year. By the end of the practicum period, 38 of 43 families having members enrolled in speech therapy had been represented at least one individualized education conference. It is believed that by the end of this school year, the number of parents/families attending their children's education conferences will have doubled, since the IEP update period is scheduled from February through April. School records had indicated that only eight of 40 families whose members were enrolled in speech-language therapy were represented at IEP conferences during the 1991-1992 school year.

3. The third expected outcome was that parents and teachers would collaborate to develop school programs which would allow students the opportunities to demonstrate their talent/interest in such areas as music, literature, visual and performing arts, sports, fashions, culinary skills, sign language, technology, and others. The response of parents to the Family Information and Involvement Survey (FIIS), particularly items 8, 9, and 10--"What are your interests/talents?" What are your "child's interests/talents?" And, would you and/or your child like to share your talents with others in a special school "talent fair?"--along with the printed program and the videotape of the talent fair, offered documentation that these opportunities did exist and that this objective was achieved. A review of printed programs over the last year indicated that school programs were structured such that students often were

not given opportunities to demonstrate their interests/talents and, consequently, parents seldom got involved in facilitating such programs.

Further results were also realized from the analysis of the other practicum evaluative instruments. The Family Information and Involvement Survey (FIIS) (see Appendix A) was filled out by the writer based on the response of each family during the first telephone conference prior to the Open House and informational meeting. The FIIS provided the writer with information regarding the family structure, organization, what time of day parents wanted to meet, what the parents and students special abilities were, whether or not parents wished to team up with their children to showcase those talents, and who had been designated to help the children with their speech notebook/homework.

The FIIS revealed what had been expected--that most of the 43 families whose members were enrolled in speech therapy were headed by single working mothers who had younger siblings in the home. The preference of most parents were for a school meeting in the evening. The special abilities/talents of the parents included: culinary skills, cosmetology, sewing, arts and crafts, modeling, and singing; while most of the strengths and talents of the students were cited and observed in: music, visual and performing arts, culinary skills, housekeeping, animal and plant care, interpersonal skills, technology, and augmentative and alternative communication skills. The FIIS garnered valuable information that gave visibility to the implementation phase of the practicum.

The Communication Observation Sheet (see Appendix B) was a ten-item instrument that was given to parents, teachers, and volunteers to determine whether or not the program goals and objectives had been addressed and achieved. The evaluators were asked to circle the appropriate response: not at all, moderately, or very much, and space was provided for comments. Twenty-nine people responded to the COS questionnaire.

The respondents rated the COS as follows:

1. The program provided a friendly, open, cooperative, helpful atmosphere

   not at all (0) moderately (4) very much (25)

2. The communication between school and home was two-way

   not at all (0) moderately (3) very much (26)

3. The school showed greater interest in and support of families and the community

   not at all (0) moderately (3) very much (26)

4. The families showed greater interest in and support of the school and community

   not at all (0) moderately (3) very much (26)

5. The community showed greater interest in and support of the school and families

   not at all (0) moderately (3) very much (26)

In responding to number six, the respondents indicated they felt that the students had shown improvement in all the areas listed: listening skills, thinking skills, writing, vocabulary words, phrases, sentences, sign language, facilitated communication, initiating social greetings and farewells, initiating conversation, verbal interaction, carryover of skills taught to other areas/settings, visual arts, performing arts, music, literature, sports, fashions, culinary skills, and facilitated friendships. Under "other," several respondents listed responsibilty, computer skills, and self-confidence.

For item seven, 19 respondents indicated that they would like to see more meetings next year while 10 wished the same amount. In the comments section, several respondents wrote that "meetings should be held monthly." Twenty-seven respondents felt that families ought to be involved more, two felt that families ought to be involved about the same and no one felt that families ought to be involved less. In item eight, the only suggestions for future meetings were that they should be held monthly and sometimes at locations other than the school. In item 10, the respondents listed four ideas that they had gleaned from this project.

1. "Parents and professionals really can work together."
2. "This project involved all of us."
3. "We should have our students use" notebooks in other subjects.
4. "We can videotape our students in class and in the community and use the tape to help us plan and teach more effectively."

Discussion

The program areas of the greatest impact included the telephone conference with each family, the high attendance and agenda at the first meeting, the Let's Communicate notebooks, the "talent fair," and the school-home-community partnership.

The writer attributes the high attendance at the open house meeting to the personal telephone conference held with each family. When the school offered transportation and child care service, parents then realized that the school had extended the hand of friendship and an invitation to partnership, as school personnel really wanted them to get involved. The literature encouraged establishing a friendly school environment that welcomes people and values their contributions. At the meeting, the writer asked several parents to briefly share their levels of involvement in their children's education. One mother discussed how she had been trained by the writer to program and teach her non-verbal daughter to use assistive technology to help her communicate. Another mother shared some of her advocacy skills, and a father described his disabled son's membership and participation in the 103rd Congressional Classroom's Career Day. The literature encouraged letting parents become involved at whatever levels were comfortable for them.

The speech notebooks were entitled Let's Communicate and the students were thrilled with them. They received help with their homework not only from family members and teachers but also from classmates and volunteers. The speech notebooks were so very popular with the speech students that several other teachers (at least four)

started requiring their students to use notebooks in the classrooms. The principal later issued writing tablets to all students as a way of addressing universal motivation for personal notebooks. The writer believes that the speech notebooks not only permitted each family to get involved in their child's education, but it produced a visual presentation of the students progress and provided the students with a frame of reference and ownership in a document that was uniquely and personally theirs.

The talent fair was extremely successful. Through the collaborative effort of teachers, families, and volunteers, the students were given the opportunity to showcase their interests and talents. The students clearly demonstrated that the fact that they are disabled does not mean they are unable. Dumas (1993) advises that when students are allowed the opportunity not only to practice what they have been taught but also to demonstrate what they are interested in, all children will show that they are gifted and have something valuable to offer others. The more that was expected of the students and the more support and encouragement given to them--the more the students gave. This was not only true of the students but of the families, school, and community as well.

A newsletter was issued to all participants expressing gratitude for their support (see Appendix F) as well as a letter requesting participants to evaluate the project by responding to the Communication Observation Sheet (see Appendix G).

Several unexpected outcomes of the practicum were realized. First, a school-home-community partnership emphasized that. All parties needed each other. The school welcomed all families and offered help to those families in need. The writer

made two home visits to address hunger. She collaborated with other professional educators and social agencies to address an abusive situation that resulted in the removal of a student from her home and her placement in a foster home. This incident gives support to the study done by Taylor and others (1991) which showed a correlation between emotional and intellectual impairment among parents who mistreat and abuse their children. The writer also worked with other professionals, case managers, and volunteers to assist three families with personal development and parenting skills. The literature warned educators that some families would have other concerns that needed to be addressed before education could take place. The families were receptive, cooperative and grateful to the school and community for their help. Second, the principal asked the writer to coordinate the school's parent involvement committee. Third, the faculty selected as the school's goal for this year "Improving teacher growth and development" and cited the writer's practicum as one of the areas in which growth was already taking place. As one teacher described it, "This project involves all of us." Fourth, the writer was selected by the faculty as the "I Care" chairperson to disseminate information and practical ideas for teachers to help their students and for parents to help their children. The writer was also selected by her faculty to receive the Brotherhood/Sisterhood Award sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Volunteers in Public Schools.

These results are indeed encouraging. The direction is favorable and positive and the students, faculty, families, and volunteers at the writer's school should continue to benefit from their involvement in this practicum experience.

Recommendations

This program is appropriate for anyone who works in the school system and has a good understanding of communication and how essential it is to the social and cognitive development of individuals. Interested individuals must also realize that communication is the key to building successful partnerships and strong coalitions.

1. The school should create an environment that lets people know they are welcome, worthy, needed, appreciated, and can make a contribution to the success of the students. One way of doing this is to organize a Parent-School Association (PTA), scheduling meetings to accommodate working parents and providing transportation and child care services as needed.

2. Raise family/school/community expectations of students by asking more of all participants, expecting more of all participants, and giving more to all participants.

3. Have students keep notebooks or portfolios. This need not be limited to speech-language therapy or the disabled population; all subjects may be included and all students may benefit.

4. Provide parent workshops, seminars, and training that target family and community involvement in teaching effective communication skills, and stimulate carryover of skills taught in the instructional setting to other environments.

5. Develop student learning activities that welcome family/community participation-- including, among other things, a talent fair.

6. Publish news from the Speech-Language Therapy Department (or any other department) highlighting student achievements and circulate within the school district

and the community via the school newsletter (and/or create a newsletter from the department) and other news media. Encourage and accept news from school, home, and the community.

Dissemination

The writer produced a videotape of her practicum and it has been viewed by teachers, parents, and students and made available for their viewing in the future. The writer plans to publish an article about her practicum in local and national publications. She also plans to present her practicum at several local, regional, and national conferences. Finally, the writer is in the process of preparing the Let's Communicate notebook for publication.

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APPENDIX A

FAMILY INFORMATION AND INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

TALLIES

FAMILY INFORMATION AND INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

NAME _____

1. Number of persons living in household _____

2. Circle the appropriate answers. My family consists of: mother, father, other children:

   Specify ages and sex ____Single mothers (mostly)_____

   _____

   _____

   Grandmother Grandfather Aunt

   Uncle Other _____

3. Who will be responsible for helping your child daily with his/her homework/speech notebook? ____mothers (mostly)_____

4. My preference for a school meeting/seminar/program is:

   morning (2) noon (1) evening (40)

5. Do you need transportation to and from the school meeting?

   Yes (10) No (33)

6. Do you need child care service?

   Yes (18) No (25)

7. Can we assist you in any other way to facilitate your involvement in your child's education? Yes (5) No (38)

Explain Answer questions about Medicaid services. Behavior problems Poverty-related situations

8. What are your interests/talents?

Cooking, sewing, shopping, meeting new people, arts and crafts, singing, playing piano, helping people, dancing, fishing, traveling, modeling, etc.

9. What are your child's interests/talents?

Music, singing, dancing, rapping, drawing, painting, cooking, operating the VCR, computer games, signing, animal care, clothes, styling hair, housekeeping, etc.

10. Would you and/or your child like to share your talent with others in a special school Talent Fair? All parents wanted and were willing to help their children to participate, but only 12 parents felt comfortable enough to share with an audience.

APPENDIX B

COMMUNICATION OBSERVATION SHEET (COS)

COMMUNICATION OBSERVATION SHEET

Tallies

Position: _____

Please circle the appropriate response and feel free to make comments.

1. The program provided a friendly, open, cooperative, helpful atmosphere

   not at all (0) moderately (4) very much (25)

   Comments:

2. The communication between school and home was two-way.

   not at all (0) moderately (3) very much (26)

   Comments:

3. The school showed greater interest in and support of the families and the community.

   not at all (0) moderately (3) very much (26)

   Comments:

4. The families showed greater interest in and support of the school and the community.

   not at all (0) moderately (3) very much (26)

   Comments:

5. The community showed greater interest in and support of the school and the families.

not at all (0) moderately (3) very much (26)

Comments:

not at all (0) moderately (11) very much (18)

6. The students showed improvement in the following areas:

x	listening skills	x	verbal interaction
x	thinking skills	x	carryover of skills taught to other areas/settings
x	writing	x	visual arts
x	vocabulary words	x	performing arts
x	phrases	x	music
x	sentences	x	literature
x	sign language	x	sports
x	facilitated communication	x	fashions
x	initiating social greetings and farewells	x	culinary skills
x	initiating conversation	x	facilitated friendships
		x	other

Responsibility
Confidence
Computer Skills

Comments: The students were so excited about the speech notebooks. Students wanted to write more. The speech notebooks became a conversation piece in our house. We could hardly wait to do the next lesson. My child appears to be more verbal since she started using the Let's Communicate notebook.

7. Next year I would like to see

more meetings (19) fewer meetings (0) same number (10)

Comments: Meetings should be held monthly.

8. Families ought to be involved

less (0) same (2) more (27)

Comments:

9. Suggestions for future meetings and other forms of family involvement:

Make talent fair annual event.
Alternate meeting sites between school and community.

10. What ideas have you gleaned from this project?

Parents and professionals really can work together.
Have students use notebooks or books in other subjects.
This project involved all of us.

APPENDIX C

NEWSLETTER

TO: Parents of Students Receiving Speech Therapy Services

FROM: Harriet A. Pitcher, Speech Therapist and Coordinator
Parent Involvement Committee
Arlington Preparatory Academy

SUBJECT: Parent Participation, Speech Notebooks and the Talent Fair

Greetings:

May this letter find all of our families doing well and looking forward to a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday. We have so much to be thankful for!

Parent/Family Participation

Arlington's Open House and Informational Meeting provided the setting for remarkable participation by many of our parents, students and community volunteers.

Mrs. Yvette Winston shared information on assistive technology. Her daughter, Charlotte, is nonverbal and is learning to use an alternative communication device to help her communicate better. Mrs. Joyce Frost, a child advocate, and mother of Sharrett Jill, talked about her love and support for children, and shared some of her advocacy skills with all in attendance. And, Mr. Bob Hindmarch talked about the experience of attending Career Day on the lawn of the Governor's Mansion with his son Christopher, who is a member of Congressman Cleo Fields' Congressional Classroom.

Thanks to our families for their attendance and participation and to the community volunteers who came and supervised the child care center during our Open House meeting.

Speech Notebooks

The students are thrilled with their speech notebooks! And I am thrilled with the response we have been getting from students, parents, faculty, staff, and community volunteers! Most of the students are getting help at home completing the homework activities and are remembering to bring the notebooks to school each day. Thanks for your help and for getting more involved in your children's education.

Talent Fair

The "Talent Fair" will be held on November 17, 1994, at 9:30 a.m., in the school auditorium. I am again inviting all parents, teachers, and volunteers to work with the students to master the talents or special skills they wish to showcase for this event. Encouraging the students to practice at home and at school will go a long way toward meeting our educational objective with this particular project. At the conclusion of our Talent Fair, a delicious Thanksgiving dinner will be served.

Thanks for your cooperation. We're having a great year!

APPENDIX D

SPEECH NOTEBOOK

Let's

Communicate

With

_____

(Name)

APPENDIX E

PROGRAM

Arlington Preparatory Academy

presents

A Talent Fair

Thursday, November 17, 1994
9:30 a.m.

We Are Thankful For Our Gifts And Talents

Program

Mrs. Harriet A. Pitcher, Presiding

Presentation of Colors ..... Girl Scouts

Pledge

Meditation

Song ..... Mrs. Cheryl M. Brandon
"God Bless America"

Welcome ..... Willie Thomas

The Occasion ..... Mrs. Harriet A. Pitcher

Sports and Special Olympics
- Softball ..... Cedric Robinson
- Basketball ..... Dan Johnson
- Volleyball ..... Kelly Daniels
- Bowling ..... Rose Smith

Square Dance to "The Virginia Reel"
Lorie Barrow, Aaron Bridges, Jill Frost, Devitta Pack, Jason Parent, Keith Powell, Antonio Selders, Trivilla Spence

Say It In Sign Language or Gestures
Jermaine Fry, Nayland Grant, LaKeitra Smith, Jeralyn Ware, Michael Williams, Charlotte Winston

We Share Our Gifts With The Homeless
Dan Johnson and Keith Powell

Spirited Fashions ..... APA Students
Directed by: Mrs. Ida Hall, Ms. Monnie Mingo, and Ms. Shelisa Williams

Clogg Dancing ..... Red Stick Cloggers

We Are Thankful ..... Arlington Rappers

Recognition of Visitors

Acknowledgements

Remarks ..... Mrs. Gwen Bruton
Principal

Video

Exhibits

Thanksgiving Dinner

"All Gifts enhance the quality of life; all talent enriches those whom it touches; all beauty adds to our pleasure; all ability is valuable." (Dunn, Dunn & Treffinger)

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank all the students, parents/families, faculty, staff, and community volunteers who participated in this, our first, Talent Fair.

Special Thanks to

Baton Rouge Barber College, Mr. Raymond Cosey, Owner

Baton Rouge Coca-Cola Bottling Company

Circuit City, Mr. Curtis Jones, Sales Counselor and
Mr. Buddy Kuhn, Manager

Hilton & Company, Ms. Sheila Hilton, Owner

Ibelco Personal Development & Enrichment Program,

Mrs. Ida Hall, Owner & Ms. Krystle Ingrid Hall, Assistant

Ms. Monnie Mingo and Ms. Shelisa Williams,
LSU Fashion Committee

The Red Stick Cloggers

Mrs. Ernestine Billingsley, Mrs. Rebecca Green,
Mrs. Lucy Murray, and Mrs. Diane Tyson,
Belfair Baptist Church Missionary Society

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

APPENDIX F

NEWSLETTER

LET'S COMMUNICATE!

by

Harriet A. Pitcher

Greetings and Happy Holidays!

Thanks a million blessings to all our students, parents/families, teachers, staff members, and community volunteers--for helping to make Arlington's first talent fair a most successful and enjoyable event! Everyone who participated is to be commended for working together to accomplish our goal of providing Arlington's students with the opportunity to showcase their skills and talents, while at the same time re-inforcing their educational achievements and building their self-esteem.

THUMBS UP: COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

Special thanks to our community volunteers who answered our call to help our students at Arlington be the best that they could be. Special recogniton to: Mr. Raymond Cosey and his students from the Baton Rouge Barber College, for giving 17 of Arlington's male student complimentary haircuts; Mr. Dana Cossey, Baton Rouge Coca Cola Bottling Company, for donating Cokes and Sprites for thie event; Mr. Curtis Jones and Mr. Buddy Kuhn, Circuit City, for providing us with the "Big Screen" T.V.; Ms. Sheila Hilton of Hilton & Company, for donating evening wear for several of our parents and students to model; Mrs. Ida Hall, Director of Ibelco Personal Develoment & Enrichment Program, her daughter, Krystle, Ms. Monnie Mingo, and Ms. Shelisa Williams, from the LSU Fashion Committee, for teaming together to teach our students modeling techniques; the Red Stick Cloggers (of which our principal, Mrs. Bruton, is a member) for their exciting clogg dancing; Mrs. Earnestine Billingsley and Mrs. Lucy Murray of the Belfair Baptist Church Missionary Society, for supervising the Child Care Center; Mrs Rebecca Green and Mrs. Diane Tyson, also of Belfair Baptist Church, for helping to put together the Let's Communicate notebooks for our 43 students receiving speech therapy services.

Again, we say thank you to our students, parents/families, faculty and staff, and community volunteers. May you all have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

APPENDIX G

EVALUATION COVER LETTER

ARLINGTON PREPARATORY ACADEMY

931 Dean Lee Drive
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70820

December 7, 1994

TO: Faculty, Staff, Parents and Volunteers
Arlington Preparatory Academy

FROM: Harriet A. Pitcher
Speech Therapist - Arlington Preparatory Academy
Doctoral Student - Nova Southeastern University

RE: Evaluation of Communication Improvement Program at Twelve Week Interval

The first twelve weeks of our Communication Improvement Program, that you so graciously supported, came to a a close with a very successful talent fair on November 17, 1994. Now we would like to evaluate the over-all effectiveness of the program through this period. To help us complete this task, please fill out the attached questionnaire and return it to me by Monday, December 12, 1994.

Accordingly, you are encouraged to reflect on the following activities that took place:

* Telephone conferences with 43 families
* Open House - Information Packets - Child Care Center
* Informational meetings (for parents, teachers, teacher aides)
* Collaborative planning/teaching
* Speech therapy sessions and speech notebooks
* Community based instruction
* Follow-up conferences with students, teachers, parents, school nurse, and Pupil Appraisal personnel
* Progress Reports
* Newsletter articles
* I Care Newsletters for teachers and parents
* Parent volunteers
* Community volunteers
* Talent Fair (program, art exhibit, culinary art exhibit, fashion extravaganza, photo gallery, video production)
* Thanksgiving dinner

Thanks for your assistance and cooperation. Have a merry Christmas and happy New Year!